

2013 Letters About Literature Level 1 Honorable Mention

Louise Cummings' letter to John Steinbeck, author of *Of Mice and Men*

January 2, 2013

Dear John Steinbeck:

I am but a girl. I am a girl living in a small town but spinning in a realm of big questions. I ask the questions: "Why?" Why do people want? Why do I want? Who am I? Where am I going? What is the meaning of life? I read Of Mice and Men and the blazing light of reality began to shine over my confusion. Forever Lenny, George and my own true identity can be engraved into my heart and whisper to me: "Ask why, find their heart, hold their hand and don't let go."

Before I read this book, I tried to understand human nature in many ways. My philosophical search seemed never-ending. Observations never answered the persistent questions. That is, not until I read Of Mice and Men. Your book inspired me to see the purest center of every human's heart, despite the vast complexity of their personality.

As I grow and develop opinions on the world around me, I am suddenly met by this question of how I plan to go about my life. Automatically, I decide it must be made up of accomplishments or failures, based on the comments from the adults surrounding me. But life is not that simple. Lenny has a dream that keeps him going and clears the window to his heart. There is a fantasy he holds onto: he can be the sweet and pure human he truly is without being held hostage by the stereotype of others. Lenny taught me that life is just as much made up of dreams. There are the dreams that I can follow to find success, if that be the goal, and there is the dream that is there to provide hope – hope that can save you when hardship is at its most extreme. There is always hope when one learns to see, as Lenny discovers, to see the reality of one's true self.

I grew up being that smart girl, that nice girl, that weak girl. I even convinced myself that this was my true personality. Only recently has this daily mask begun malfunctioning. There is a quest set in front of me to be the person I have only been able to glimpse from

within. If and when people see a person for whom they really are, as Lenny tried to be, there is harmony. There is so much unknown importance in this simple task. Anyone can find themselves in Lenny. We start out as a pure slate – at your core you are you. But do we have the opportunity to choose just who or what will affect our lives? Like George, who loved Lenny, but could not save him. Being different from him lead to his destruction.

Recently, I was thrown into a new environment of confusion and disorganization mostly commonly known as: middle school. There is much that I haven't learned yet about the smelly halls, the vulgar insults, the giggling cliques, and unreachable outcasts – but this book has taught me about the reasons that lie hidden behind their eyes. People believe in things that they see to be true, to be right, but at the same time their own thoughts may be contradicted by them. If they convince you of their beliefs, you become subject to any ignorance, despair, and suffering that comes with it. There is so much more than that to the meaning of life and the person I want to become. Lenny never fully received the understanding he deserved, as any person should. The physical strength he possessed easily put him in harm's way by the simple problem of stereotypes – stereotypes that made him paranoid, and created tension with the people around him.

If everyone in this world could see the magnificent and simple beauty in friendships, dreaming, caring, and overcoming challenges that this book represents, then perhaps peace can be achieved. Perhaps, as I think about soft rabbits and mice or hurt, lost souls, I can be the one to make it matter. Maybe I can change it. Maybe every reader of this book can create change as we embark on individual journeys. I can't thank you enough for the depth of understanding that your book has given me, for the challenges it has allowed me to overcome, and for the true life that I can live. Thank you.

Sincerely, Lousie Cummings